

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023*

**Remarks Commemorating the 58th Anniversary of the "Bloody Sunday" March for Voting Rights in Selma, Alabama**  
*March 5, 2023*

*The President.* Hello, hello, hello! Please. Oh, you see all those folks out there.

Hey, everybody. How are you? Selma is here! Well, before I—please, have a seat, if you have one. I once said that, "Have a seat if you have one," and the press said: "They don't have seats. He didn't even—he's so stupid, he didn't know that." Those folks might—they might not have them back there, but you all do here.

Folks, look, there's a lot to say. I'm going to try not to say very much in terms of length of time. But I want to say a few things.

It was mentioned that we should be working for the people of Africa. For years, I was chairman of the African Affairs Subcommittee in the United States Senate, and we have invested—my wife just got back from Zambia and Namibia. She's there all the time. We just made sure we have billions of dollars committed to build Africa. Angola is going to have the largest solar facility in all of Africa. We're investing in Africa because Africa is important and because everything happening there will affect us. So, folks, that's number one.

Number two, I want to make sure that—you know, I've told the mayor, I think mayor is being the toughest job in America. But one of the mayors who took some time to come and help me put together my program: Keisha Lance Bottoms. Keisha, would you stand up? From Atlanta. She's, understandably, going home because she's got some kids and it's about time. She promised she'd stay as long as she did, and she did. But we got another mayor coming too. So, anyway, thank you very much, Keisha.

And, folks, you know, the last time I was here—my daughter is a social worker—Ashley Biden was with me. She couldn't be with me today—she wanted to—because she's working on a project for battered women up in Delaware and Philadelphia. So she sends her best.

On this stage, "the children of God" started a journey. "Walking . . . not saying a word . . . beaten, tear-gassed." On this bridge, blood was given to help "redeem the soul of America." Last time I was—he was here, I was with him. John Lewis. They were his words.

Mayor Perkins, Congresswoman Terri Sewell, Members of Congress, all of you who are here; Charles Mauldin and all the foot soldiers of Selma; distinguished guests: We're—you are—among the final words of our dear friend John Lewis, delivered as he stood on the bridge over troubled waters 3 years ago. I had the privilege to stand here with him. Words that give meaning to the past and purpose to the future.

I've been on this bridge before as Vice President, as a candidate for President; I was even here before as a Senator—because history matters. And now I'm here as your President. The truth matters, notwithstanding what the other team is trying to hide. They're trying to hide the truth. No matter how hard some people try, we can't just choose to learn what we want to know and not what we should know. We should learn everything—the good, the bad, the truth—of who we are as a nation. And everyone should know the truth of Selma.

Six hundred believers put faith into action to march across that bridge named after the Grand Dragon of the KKK. They were on their way to the State capitol in Montgomery to claim their fundamental right to vote laid in the bedrock of our Constitution, but stolen by hate harbored in

too many hearts. With unflinching courage, foot soldiers for marched—for justice marched through the valley of the shadow of death, and they feared no evil.

The forces of hate conspired to demise, but they endured. They forced the country to confront the hard truths and to act to keep the promise of America alive. I was a student up north in the civil rights movement. I remember feeling how guilty I was, I wasn't here. How could we all be up there and you going through what you went through, looking at those—I can still picture—you can still picture the troopers with their batons and wands and whips. A promise that declares we're all created and deserve to be treated equally.

Two weeks later, they marched to Montgomery with Dr. King, an even bigger coalition of people from different races and faiths. Five months later, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law 5 months later. But as I come here in commemoration—not for show—Selma is a reckoning.

The right to vote—the right to vote, to have your vote counted—is the threshold of democracy and liberty. With it, anything is possible. Without it—without that right—nothing is possible. And this fundamental right remains under assault.

The conservative Supreme Court has gutted the Voting Rights Act over the years. Since the 2020 election, a wave of States and dozens—dozens—of antivoting laws fueled by the "big lie," and the election deniers now elected to office. The new law here in Alabama, among other things, enacted a new congressional map that discriminated against Black voters by failing to include what should have been a new predominately Black district.

That case, as you all know better than I, is in front of the U.S. Supreme Court. And my U.S. Department of Justice has joined many of you in arguing that the map violates the Voting Rights Act. All of this after a deadly insurrection on January the 6th. We must remain vigilant.

In January, I signed the Electoral Count Reform Act to protect the will of the people and the people transferring the—and the peaceful transfer of power. But we know that we must get the votes in Congress to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom To Vote Act. I've made it clear I will not let a filibuster obstruct the sacred right to vote and the right of any other right that flow from there.

And that's why we followed the words that you all have, the words of Dr. King. He said, "Give us the ballot, and we will place judges on the bench . . . who will do justly." Led by Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson and more Black women appointed to the Federal appellate court than every other President in history has done, we're about to do that.

After Senate Republicans blocked the—the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act last year, I did what was in my power. I signed an Executive order requiring all the key elements of the bill applied to Federal law enforcement I couldn't make at the States: banning chokeholds, greatly restricting no-knock warrants, establishing a database for police misconduct, advancing effective and accountable community policing that builds public trust. And we'll keep fighting to pass the reform nationwide.

Folks, well, we passed the most significant gun safety law in 30 years, but I'm not ready to stop, nor is Jim Clyburn or anybody else up there ready to stop. I led the effort when I was a Senator to pass the assault weapons ban. And we banned assault—we're going to ban assault weapons again. They matter. When we had the ban, fewer people died. Fewer mass shootings.

And together, we're saying loud and clearly that, in America, hate and extremism will not prevail, although they are rearing their ugly head with significance now. Silence—as the saying goes: Silence is complicity. And I promise you my administration will not remain silent. I promise you.

The task before us is about justice, but it's also about jobs, financial stability, the ability to generate generational wealth. It's about hope, self-worth. It's about dignity. That's why we're building an economy—that I've been significantly criticized for, but I make no apologies—that grows the economy from the bottom up and the middle out, not from the top down.

We weren't poor, but we weren't wealthy. We were a typical middle class family with a three-bedroom home and four kids and a grandpop living with us. I don't remember anything trickling down from my—on my dad's kitchen table with the trickle-down economic problem. Because when we do that—we build from the middle out and the bottom up—the poor have a ladder up, the middle class does very well, and the wealthy still do well. We all do well.

But we know there's work to do, especially as you recover from this devastating tornado and the storms that hit in January. That's why, working with Terri and the mayor, I issued a major disaster declaration immediately, committing the Federal Government to cover 100 percent of the debris removal. We also are paying for temporary housing and home repairs, supporting local businesses, small businesses, as well as doing in other towns devastated as you have been. To date, we've provided \$8 million in recovery, and we're just getting started the rebuilding effort. And we're here—we'll be here as long as it takes.

The first major bill we passed without a single vote from the other team was the American Rescue Plan, when I was sworn in. That has provided \$60 million to Selma and Dallas County directly.

One of the things, having been a county official for 2 years, I learned a long time ago: I didn't like anything that went through the State legislature. [Laughter] Oh, I'm not joking. They're good people, but they all want a piece of it. If it was supposed to come to my county, it'd better damn well come to my county directly. So this is going directly to your county, directly to your city, to keep teachers, nurses, police officers, firefighters on the job.

Selma is also benefiting from the bipartisan infrastructure law, which is a multi-, multibillion-dollar commitment to rebuild this country. How can we be the leading economy in the world if we don't have the best roads, ports, and so on? How can we be that? Well, guess what? It's the largest investment in infrastructure since Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System.

Here in Selma, we're funding major water projects, removing over 800 poisonous lead-pipe service lines that are over a hundred years old, because every child should be able to turn on a faucet and drink clean water without fear of getting sick. And it's also going to deliver affordable high-speed internet to every single home in this county and this city. And no parent—so no parent, God forbid another pandemic, is going to have to sit in the McDonald's parking lot to use their internet to be able to get no—have their kid's homework be done.

Look, and in the process, these kinds of investments are going to create good-paying jobs. Most of these jobs don't require college degrees. They'll be able to hire here, hire in your community. And by the way, the unemployment rate for African Americans under my administration is the second lowest it's ever been in all of American history, and we're going to continue to make sure that happens.

And by the way, I'm the only President, I've learned, that had permanent offices in the White House for the Divine Nine and the HBCUs. I figured it out, man. I figured it out. [Laughter] Now, I know that the Vice President thinks that Howard is the best. Delaware State University, where I come from. But all kidding aside, we've contributed billions of dollars to put HBCUs in a position, because they don't have—[applause]—I mean it seriously, billions of dollars—because they don't have the kind of trust funds that the major schools have.

So guess what? It leaves out an awful lot of qualified African Americans at HBCUs from learning how to deal with cybersecurity, learning how to deal with all the stuff in the future. Guess what? Right now—now they have that. And I'm able, as the President of the United States, to award these contracts directly there, because they have—they have the—they have a lab. I'm serious. It's a big deal. There's a lot more we're doing for Selma and cities like it all across America.

When I passed the Inflation Reduction Act—which, again, the other team didn't participate at all—which allows Medicare to negotiate drug prices for the first time. Do you realize, in America, we pay more for prescription drugs than any nation in the world? You hear me? More. And I've been fighting this for the last 25 years.

But guess what? We finally beat Big Pharma. So, now—oh, man, I—you have no idea how good I felt about that one. Because what's happened? What happened is, now Medicare can say, "We are not going to pay you more than \$35," instead of \$400, "for that insulin that you need." And guess what that means? Not only—not only—it reduced prices for people who need help, but it reduces the Federal budget by \$158 billion. You know, we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

In addition to that, when we reduced the cost of insulin for seniors on Medicare, we got a commitment. Initially, I proposed that we reduce it for anybody needing that insulin. Well, guess what? The other team voted that down too. But along came—along came—the largest maker of insulin in the country. They, as they said, "seen the Lord." *[Laughter]* They saw a light. And here's the deal—I'm not kidding: Eli Lilly, one of the biggest drug makers of insulin, they just announced they're going to cap the cost of all their insulin at \$35.

And guess what that means. No other company is going to be able to charge more than that because no one is going to buy it. For everyone else with diabetes, that's going to help 500,000 folks in Alabama today—*[applause]*—that are on this. And it's going to reduce the price from somewhere between 4- and 600 bucks a month to \$35 a month. So let's finish the job. Lower the price for everyone, including the 200,000 children with type 1 diabetes across this country. But there's more work to do. We'll protect Social Security and Medicare, and we'll protect—

Did you—by the way, did you see that State of the Union Address?

*Audience member.* Yes!

*The President.* I said, "That means all you guys are against cutting Medicare and Social Security?" "Oh, yes!" Well, in my religion, we go: "Bless me, Father. That's a wonderful thing." *[Laughter]*

*[At this point, the President mad the sign of the cross.]*

Look, Medicaid is critically important to people that are having trouble making it. And the Affordable Care Act—we increased the available money by 800 bucks for those folks. We're going to make sure we protect those two to make sure they get the care they need.

Look, we need to reward work, not just wealth, because no—the idea—you know, we used to have about 670 billionaires in America. Now we have about a thousand. Do you realize they pay a lower tax rate than your police officers or the people driving that ambulance? They pay a lower tax rate than hard-working folks. I think you should be able to make a trillion dollars. Just pay your fair share, Jack. No, I mean it. And there's no—and by the way, we'll also cut the deficit if we have them begin to pay their fair share.

Look, with Terri's leadership, let's make sure working parents in Selma and across the country have a living wage. There should be sick days available, paid family and medical leave. We're the only country in the Nation—in the world that doesn't have it. Affordable childcare and

eldercare, it saves money. Let's restore the full child tax credit. And by the way, that cut—that cut—Black child poverty in half and gave tens of millions of parents some breathing room, including almost a million folks in Alabama.

I was telling the mayor on the way over: My dad was a hard-working guy, a real gentleman, a decent man. He never got a college degree. He never got to go to college. It was the great regret he had. But know what he used to say, for real? I'm sorry I always quote my dad, but he—it's worth saying. He'd say: "Joey, remember, a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about your decency. It's about respect. It's about being able to look your kid in the eye and say, 'Honey, it's going to be okay.'"

It's so easy to make that happen without any fundamental changes. But they're not letting us up to now. With HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge—Marcia, you're here, aren't you? There you are. She's my Secretary of Housing and Urban Affairs. Look, she's leading the way on housing discrimination and affordable, quality housing. My message to you is this: We see you. We're fighting to make sure no one is left behind. This is a time of choosing, and we need everybody engaged.

We know history does not look kindly on those who deny the march across the bridge to redeem the soul of America.

Let me close with this. In many of your faith traditions, Sunday is the Sabbath, a day of rest. But on that Sunday morning, on March 7, 1965, Amelia Boynton Robinson and 600 of her fellow children of God chose different pews.

On this bridge of her beloved Selma, they were called to the altar of democracy, unsure of their fate, but certain that the cause was righteous. So she would go on to say, quote, "You can never know where you're going unless you know where you've been." We know where we have been.

And, my fellow Americans, on this Sunday of our time, we know where we've been, and we know, more importantly, where we have to go: forward, together. So let's pray, but let's not rest.

Let's keep marching. Let's keep the faith. But most of all, let's remember who we are. We're the United States of America, and there's nothing—nothing—beyond our capacity when we act together. So let's go and finish the job.

God bless you all, and may God bless our troops.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. In his remarks, he referred to outgoing White House Office of Public Engagement Director Keisha Lance Bottoms, in her former capacity as mayor of Atlanta, GA; incoming White House Office of Public Engagement Director Stephen K. Benjamin, in his former capacity as mayor of Columbia, SC; civil rights activist Charles Mauldin, who introduced the President; and Rep. James E. Clyburn. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens and brothers James B. and Francis W. Biden.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : "Bloody Sunday" voting rights march, 58th anniversary commemoration in Selma, AL.

*Locations:* Selma, AL.

*Names:* Benjamin, Stephen K.; Biden, Ashley; Biden, Francis W.; Biden, James B.; Biden, Jill T.; Bottoms, Keisha Lance; Clyburn, James E.; Fudge, Marcia L.; Harris, Kamala D.; Jackson, Ketanji Brown; Mauldin, Charles; Owens, Valerie Biden; Perkins, James, Jr. ; Sewell, Terri A.

*Subjects:* "Bloody Sunday" voting rights march in Selma, AL, 58th anniversary; 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Africa, U.S. assistance; Alabama, disaster assistance; Alabama,

President's visit; Alabama, tornado damage and recovery efforts; Broadband and wireless technologies; Child tax credit ; Civil rights movement; Community policing programs, improvement efforts; Disaster assistance, Alabama; Domestic violence; Economic improvement; Economic stimulus legislation; Election security and integrity, strengthening efforts; Electoral Count Reform Act; Federal court nominations and confirmations; Gun control efforts; Hate-based violence, efforts to combat; Health care costs and affordability; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs); Home ownership, access and affordability; Household income and wages; Housing discrimination, efforts to combat; Infrastructure improvements; Insulin cost controls; Job creation and growth; Law enforcement, use-of-force policy improvement; Lead service lines, replacement efforts; Medicare and Medicaid programs; Policing best practices, improvement efforts; Poverty reduction efforts; Prescription drug costs, reduction efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Senior Adviser for Public Engagement; Social Security program; Supreme Court Associate Justice; Tax Code reform; Vice President; Voting rights.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202300172.